

JAMES F. WILSON:  
THE ORAL REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD SHEEPHERDER



One of the Australian Merino rams imported by Jim Wilson for University of California crossbreeding experiments. From left to right: W. P. (Chet) Wing, Secretary, California Wool Growers Association, Jim Wilson, and Mrs. J. W. Mailliard, donor of the sheep to the University of California. January 18, 1951.

Fox River Bond  
25% cotton

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JAMES F. WILSON:

THE ORAL REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD SHEEPHERDER

Introduction by Glenwood M. Spurlock  
Animal Science Extension

Interviews conducted by  
A. I. Dickman and G. M. Spurlock

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Statement of Editorial Purpose

The procedures of our oral history projects include not only the tape recording of memoirs but also their transcription, editing, and eventual production in book form. What is presented to the reader is a version of the spoken word, and overt attempts to mask this fact rob the presentation of the intimacy, candor and spontaneity which give each memoir freshness and charm. However, standard and recognized editorial techniques are used to maintain a consistency of style throughout all oral history project publications. Since basically each title is for University archival deposit, such matters as dates, names, places and scientific terminology must be presented with the utmost precision. Editors will rely on the Chicago Manual of Style (1969) and the project's own style sheet to maintain an optimal printed version of the spoken word. Thus, the UC Davis Oral History Center has applied this editorial policy to the taped-transcribed portions of the Wilson memoir (see Interview History, p. iii).

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INTRODUCTION

I have known Jim for many years and have had the privilege of working closely with him during various periods.

Jim is an extremely well educated, down-to-earth man. He has an impressive command of the English language and a keen analytical mind, with a very lively sense of humor.

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## INTRODUCTION

I have known J. F. "Jim" Wilson for many years and have had the privilege of working closely with him for extended periods.

Jim is an extremely well educated, down-to-earth-man. He has an impressive command of the English language and a keen analytical mind, with a very lively sense of humor.

You are not around Jim very long without being impressed with his strong principles and his complete honesty. He came from a generation and a people whose word was their bond. He is absolutely devoted to and proud of his family.

Professionally he has always been a man of highest standards who was an outstanding teacher. Highly skilled and with top training in wool technology, he had an international reputation in that field during his active life.

As a man, a person among all kinds of people, Jim Wilson is known and respected by a million friends.

I am also including a poem to Jim. A picture of him taken on my ranch in May 1953 and the poem were mounted on a 14" x 18" pebble board and presented to him at his retirement party.

G. M. Spurlock  
March 12, 1975

"The Old Buck is Turned Out to Pasture."

To Professor J. F. Wilson

He's been here thirty years and eight.  
He's known throughout the world with great reknown.  
With sheep and wool his studies concerned.  
His courses dealt with these - his teachings sound.

Years long the students came to get advice  
On classwork - other problems that they bore.  
To all he listened well and helped them on  
Till their own children knocked at that same door.

Now comes retirement - freedom that he's earned.  
We pray though that he'll miss the old school bell  
And stay close by to help us carry on  
And keep the pattern that he's formed so well.

The old brown desk was made for him alone,  
His microscope and scales, his old work pants.  
No one can take his place nor do as well.  
Wool waits the master's touch - the expert glance.

The many friends he's helped so in the past,  
Whose memory of him never will grow dim.  
Will look in through this door with lifted brows  
to say, "Maybe you can help me, Mister, \_\_\_\_\_  
Where's Jim"?

### History of the Interview

The Faculty Advisory Committee of the Oral History office at U.C. Davis had recommended that the memoir of Jim Wilson be obtained as soon as possible because of the gravity of the emphysema from which he suffered. The Animal Science department was also anxious to have the Wilson memoir completed. Department Chairman Eric Bradford suggested that Glenwood M. Spurlock, Animal Science extension specialist in sheep and wool serve as a joint interviewer. This was in May 1974 and because of heavy Oral History office commitments it was hoped to commence the interviews in early Fall. However, when we talked to Professor Wilson about a convenient schedule of interviews he urged us to start right away as he "felt the curtains closing in."

So foregoing the usual preparation prior to taping which generally involves interviewing many persons who know the interviewee, reading newspaper clips and the preparation of an outline of his life; we began our interview immediately, on May 2, 1974.

We had held two short taping sessions when Professor Wilson, seeking relief from his breathing difficulty, was hospitalized for a week. His shortness of breath was evident in the taping sessions as he had only limited energy and tired very quickly.

He was in improved spirits and health on his return from the hospital and we completed the interviews in a final session.

Joint interviewer Glenwood Spurlock from his own knowledge of Wilson's specialized field asked pertinent questions regarding his work and teaching. Otherwise the memoir would have been more of a reminiscence than a structured recall.

In spite of the difficulties and the lack of preparation, the memoir sparkles with Jim Wilson's unique personality and humor and brief as it is, does provide a glimpse of his work and times.

Wilson read the transcript of the tape and made several corrections. We think he was reasonably pleased with it.

Professor James F. Wilson died on August 9, 1975. He was followed in death by his wife Margaret Arnold Wilson on January 24, 1976.

A. I. Dickman  
Interviewer-Editor



Davis Chamber of Commerce nominee for Director,  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 1959



Fiftieth wedding anniversary

## EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

A.I.D.: Professor Wilson, where were you born and what was your date of birth?

Wilson: I was born in Cynthiana, Posey County, Indiana. August the fourteenth, 1892. Or at least that's what my mother said.

A.I.D.: Where did you go to grade school and high school and college? What was your education, in other words?

Wilson: Well, I went to grade school first in Canyon City, Colorado. My father was a medical doctor who had very bad health. And, when I was a small child, it was decided that we should leave Indiana and go West, in the interest of his health. We first went to Canyon City, Colorado, where we stayed a year and it was there that I started my education in first grade. We only lived there a little over a year, and it was decided to move to still higher altitude. That took us to Laramie, Wyoming, where I continued to go to school and went through the regular sequence of grades. There were some interruptions because my father died in 1902 when I was not quite nine years of age. And my mother, then, took us back to Indiana, where she entered a normal school to renew her teacher's certificate. And, while there, in Terre Haute, Indiana, I was placed in grade school again. When we went back to Laramie at the end of the year, she had a position teaching to support the family.

A.I.D.: How many of you were there?

Wilson: Three children. One sister two years older, and a brother four and a half years younger.

Now, I learned a lesson in connection with this schooling. My best friend that I had as a small boy was a boy named Frank McBroom. He was very, very bright. And we were together all the time we could be. So, when we went back to Indiana, and then returned to Laramie, the Superintendent of Schools asked me what grade I belonged to. I saw a chance right away. So I said, "Well, I don't know. But wherever Frank McBroom is is where I belong." He looked it up and Frank McBroom had jumped two years, and so I was put

Wilson: in the seventh grade without ever having been to either the fifth or the sixth. It was quite a challenge, but I eventually got over the hurdle. The lesson that I learned was that it takes a lot more than brains to get along in the world. Because Frank McBroom matured, left school at the eighth grade, which was customary at the time, went out, got a venereal disease that ruined his life, and died when he was still in his thirties.

And, if I had my choice of putting a child in school at the age of five instead of six, or putting a child in at seven instead of six, I would put the child in school at seven.

#### COLLEGE DAYS

Wilson: Well, at that time, it was customary for boys and girls to go through the eighth grade and quit. Their education was then supposed to be complete. My mother wanted us to keep going. Laramie had no high school. It was a town of 6,000 people, but it had no high school. Boys were supposed to work for the Union Pacific Railroad, or go to work on ranches, become cowboys or ranchmen in their own right, or take laborers' jobs. Very few of them went for a higher education.

For those who wanted to, however, the University of Wyoming maintained what was referred to as preparatory school. It was the equivalent of a high school. But some of the policies were nothing short of academic murder. And they had so little money to run the place, that they threw high school age kids right in with university students. And they sat in the same classrooms and took the same examinations. Now, I have to admit that this was certainly poor pedagogy, but in my case, it had one advantage. Every time I went into a class like that I was so scared that I got down and scratched gravel. To keep up. [Laughter] And, I was stimulated to be a student. In other words, I did more than just take courses. Oh, at the end of preparatory school I entered the regular degree work of the institution. And graduated in the year 1913, with a Bachelor of Science Degree.

Wilson: And my mother, who had been widowed at the age of 36 was an educated woman. Graduated from Valparaiso University. She was a great student of literature. And, every time I came home with a report card or a schedule of courses, she would ask, "Where is the English course on that list?" And I would say, "Well, Mother, I've had enough of that stuff, and I'm not going to take that anymore." Mother would say, "You get out of here and don't you come back to this house until there's an English course on there." Well, to please her, which I always wanted to do, I kept on taking these English courses. And the result was, I had courses in Shakespeare and Browning, Tennyson, and all the other classics, Milton, and learned to like them. And, I guess I'm probably the only--well, I'm the only agricultural student that I ever heard of that graduated with a major in Agriculture, and by going one more semester I could have graduated with a major in English. It did whet my appreciation very much and, since my wife had the same teachers that I had in a good many of these courses, we later, much later, found it appropriate to endow a University scholarship in honor of one of those teachers.

#### FIRST JOB

A.I.D.: Where did you get your first job when you graduated from college?

Wilson: When I first graduated from college. Well, I had been working every summer on Wyoming ranches, I went to school in the wintertime and worked on ranches as a laborer during the summer. We used to break horses, of course, to ride and we'd get these wild horses, put them in a corral and rope them. We would drag one out and when the poor thing was almost ready to pass out of existence from being choked to death, shove it up to a snubbing post in the middle of the corral and put a blindfold on. And then put the saddle on and get in the saddle, get the rider in the saddle and have somebody jerk the blindfold off and, of course, the animal would just go to town. And if you were good enough you could stick. And you'd dig your spurs into him and eventually you'd break the animal's spirit. So he wouldn't try to get you off. That was considered the best way to break a horse. Did almost the same way breaking them to

Wilson: work, to drive and so forth. And a breaking cart. Well, if they did kick they couldn't hit anything, they were too far out front.

Well, years later a horse specialist named Oliver was persuaded to come to Dubois, Idaho to one of our meetings one time, and put on a demonstration. And the demonstration was called "the old and the new" in breaking horses to ride. Everybody at the meeting was out there to watch it. We went out to a corral and he said, "I'll show you the old way first." And he was a fellow, then, about forty years old, and he had been a cowboy at one time, before he went away to the university. He went through this rigmarole, he lariatted this horse, snubbed him up, blindfolded him and he got on and somebody jerked the blindfold off and boy, that horse just went to town. And this fellow could ride. He stuck him to the last and the horse just quit in sheer exhaustion. He couldn't get that man off. Then, he jumped off and said, "Now, that was a lot of foolishness, now I'll show you how it ought to be done."

He took the other horse and brought him into the corral. Neither horse had ever had a hand laid on him. And he lariatted the horse but he didn't jerk up on the lariat, he just threw it over him and let the end of the rope drag in the corral. He took two other lariats and he lariatted that horse by each front pastern, and then he put the end of those ropes around his waist, almost around, and he'd pull on the pastern. And the horse would finally yield and take one step forward, you see. And then he'd work on him again and he'd take another step forward. First thing you know, within ten minutes he was leading the horse around the corral. No trouble at all. Then he tied him up and petted him on the neck and talked with him, and finally eased the saddle up. And the horse kicked up his heels a few times, but that's all he did. And, at long last, he reached down and secured the blindfold on the horse. And then he tightened up the saddle and then he took the blindfold off. And just let the horse walk around with the saddle on. And after a while he got on. And, by golly, the horse began to kick up his heels, you know, and gave every indication of bucking and the rider just held the horse's head up. First thing you know he had his nostrils pointing just up to the clouds and the result was that darn horse couldn't buck if he wanted to, and he

Wilson: never did. And, in fifteen minutes he was walking him around riding him. Never did buck. All right, that's the old versus the new and what we have to watch out for.

And, then I, I guess accidentally, won a scholarship at the University of Missouri. And I went down there to get an advanced degree. So, while I was there, I went down to the post office and there was an ad for civil service examinations, U. S. Department of Agriculture. And I thought, well, I might as well try it, it doesn't cost anything. And I recall that I had to furnish a photograph and didn't have one, didn't have any money to get one, so I found an old snapshot, and thought this will do or I'll just let it go. 'Cause I had no intention of ever going to work for the government. It was simply to see what the examination was like. And, when I got through with this examination, I thought, well, I guess I did all right, I think I did. And, I found out later that I had, because I was offered a job in agronomy, and also a job in animal husbandry. And, naturally, I took the job in animal husbandry. I didn't have anything else to do.

So I went back to Washington, D. C. and that was my first job. And, I recall so well what it paid. Thirteen hundred and eighty dollars a year. And, I was just about as well off as I am now. [Laughter] All right.

G.S.: Jim, you were working, one time, taking data on some of the ewes at Dubois, weren't you? Where was this in relation-- was that summer work?

Wilson: That was in connection with my job that I had in Washington. I was--had a grandiose title of Scientific Assistant. And this big experiment station had been established at Dubois, Idaho, and I was sent out there several times to work with this band of range sheep that we had, and get the data and take them back to Washington and analyze them.

Then, later, I was appointed as what they called a collaborator. They had a group of men in the western states who were called collaborators with the USDA. And, I was one of those so I went, almost every year, out there. To determine the policies and go over the research work that had been done. Now this was not the Committee that I also served on of the USDA that met in Washington, D. C. That was to outline new experiments instead of going over what

Wilson: had been done.

G.S.: That was the Sheep and Wool Advisory Committee, the National Sheep and Wool Adivsory Committee.

Wilson: That's right, the National Sheep and Wool Advisory Committee.

G.S.: I remember that you were still a collaborator with the Dubois station at the time that you retired.

Wilson: That's right, yes I was.

Then war broke out. First World War. I went into that. I went down and volunteered on the streets of Washington, D. C. And, I served my time in the Army; thanks to schooling they made an officer out of me. Not a very good one, but an officer nevertheless. After that I went back to my job in Washington, in the government service, the Bureau of Animal Industry.

#### MOVE TO DAVIS

Wilson: I had an invitation from Gordon H. True, Professor of Animal Husbandry, to come to Davis. That there was a position open for me as a sheep and wool specialist. Before I even had a chance to answer that letter, I had another one, offering the same thing and a slightly higher salary to go to Oklahoma A and M. I went to my boss, whose name was F. R. Marshall, and told him I was determined I was going to quit. And move. Because, I said, "I want to get married and I cannot marry anyone and live on the income that I get from my present job here in Washington. It costs too much to live. So, I'm going to take one of these jobs, and I want you to tell me which one to take." He said, "Well, now, if you are determined that you're going to quit, I guess there's nothing I can do about it. I will tell you now that I was once Professor of Animal Husbandry, Chairman of the Department at Davis, California. I left Davis after a violent blow-up with Dean Thomas F. Hunt. He and I tangled, and he was bull-headed and I guess I am too. I wasn't even there six months 'til I resigned and left. Therefore I never could recommend that place, but, Jim, for God's sake, don't go to Oklahoma." And, I said, "Thank you

Wilson: very much." This was exactly the kind of information I wanted.

I wrote to Professor True and told him that I was going out to Idaho in late April to assist with the shearing of the sheep and the taking of records on the sheep at the U. S. Sheep Experiment Station at Dubois, Idaho. Following that I would come to Davis to look over the job and see if we could arrive at some understanding or if I was interested.

And this was what impelled me to come to Davis. I was alone, and I got off at the little station down here, I walked up the street. And right where the Brinley Building is now, there was a yard with a private home, and the whole yard was filled full of rose bushes. I determined right then this is the place I want to live. [Laughter] I didn't care much about what the job was, I wanted to live there and I wanted to settle down. So, then I kept on going and I met Professor True. And told him yes, I'm interested in coming. I will accept your offer. That's what brought me to Davis.

#### MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

A.I.D.: Did you stop on the way out and pick up a young lady named Margaret Arnold?

Wilson: That was the reason, primarily, that I wanted to resign my job in Washington. I wanted to get married, and I couldn't get married and live in Washington. And, I felt that I didn't belong back there anyway. I didn't belong in any big city. So, when I resigned, I went out there and got her on July 19, 1919 and we went on a honeymoon up to Portland, Oregon, and at the end of the honeymoon, we came here to Davis. Landed here on August 1, 1919.

Our marriage has been blessed by four children, two sons and two daughters. They are a mixture of Scottish descent on my side, German, Danish and English on their mother's side, so I told them that I thought they were all just a bunch of racial hamburger. And, the segregation of genes in this great mixture, there are no two of them alike, they are all different. And, they have all gotten degrees

Wilson: from the University of California; mother and I stayed home and lived on soup sandwiches for a long time while they were doing it. They all went through for degrees and one of them for a masters degree. We lost one of the two sons. He was a lawyer. Graduated from Hastings College of Law. We're like everybody else, of course. Our own children are more attractive, more intelligent, more everything than anybody else's children.

A.I.D.: What are their names and where are they now and what are they doing?

Wilson: The older daughter, named Mary, is married to a fellow named John McCollum; he's of Scottish descent. And John McCollum graduated from Cal.

He graduated from Cal in English and Journalism. Went back home to where he was born in Coalinga, California, near Fresno, to help his father run the newspaper. Discovered he could sing and he liked to sing. And, he said that the happiest days of his life were when he was all by himself in a Navy fighter plane, flying at thirty-thousand feet up and singing at the top of his lungs. [Laughter] Well, today, to show you how fortunes can change, he is Professor of Music, Chairman of the Voice Department at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. The other daughter--

A.I.D.: How many children do they have?

Wilson: They have two, and both of their children have masters degrees.

The other daughter's our youngest child. Elizabeth. She was more of an academic type than Mary. She married James Edward Knott III, whose father was long-time chairman of the Truck Crops, Vegetable Crops Department on our campus. And is now in retirement. They have two daughters, both in college.

A.I.D.: Here at Davis?

Wilson: No, one goes to school in Pennsylvania, and the other to Wooster College in Ohio. But they're younger than the others. Except John's. Then, my son, Robert, the one whom

Wilson: we lost, was an attorney in San Jose. He left two daughters and a son. And we see them once in a while. And, then our son John runs a manufacturing plant downtown, where they make the Elastrator and the rubber rings that go with them. That's his life, running that plant. He has three children--two boys and a girl. The boy, the older boy's in college now, finishing his second year. The youngest is another boy, and he's ready to start senior high school.

And, we're very happy with those grandchildren. We've got ten grandchildren all together, and not a hare-lip in the bunch and not a one of the ten uses pot. They've all kept out of jail and that's more than a lot of people can say.

A.I.D.: IMPRESSIONS OF DAVIS IN THE 1920'S

Wilson: Now, the population of Davis the time I arrived was about twelve hundred souls, all sleeping in comfortable somnolence in the sun. The town had no paved streets, very, very few sidewalks, paved sidewalks downtown on G Street in the business section, and that's all. Mud in the wintertime was clear up to your hips. I recall, all too well, getting stuck in my automobile. Between 2nd and 3rd Street on F, there was an old swale that ran through the town, as sort of a drainage ditch. I got down in there in the wintertime in a Ford Model-T, and got stuck and had to be hauled out. And I wasn't the only one either. There were lots of others in the same fix. Everyone in town knew everybody else by his first name, knew when his wife was going to have the next baby and everybody was pretty happy. There were no inhibitions against keeping livestock in town; many, many people had cows. Chickens were common. I had chickens at my first home at 232 B Street. I kept chickens in my back yard. And, two blocks away, at the corner of B Street and Fifth, was the Wiley Lloyd residence where he ran a commercial turkey farm. He raised turkeys and hounds--greyhounds.

And in the wintertime, the odor around there was discernible to say the least.

A.I.D.: What kind of a telephone system did you use?

Wilson: Oh, we had a lulu. The telephones were all the old crank type that hung on the wall, and you'd spin the crank and wait for Central to say, "Who was you tryin' to get?" And we had one downtown here who knew everything. I won't say her name because she's got living relatives right here in town now. But she was cockeyed and she sat at the switchboard near the front of the place, which was on G Street between 2nd and 3rd, on the west side of the street. And when she looked at the switchboard, one eye saw the switchboard and the other one was out in the street. And, very often you'd call up and say, "Give me Glenn Spurlock." You'd never use the telephone book, of course. "Well, it ain't any use to call him, I just seen him go by here a minute ago." [Laughter]

A.I.D.: Was there a resident doctor in town?

Wilson: Yes, we had two of them. One of their names was Bates and he was a very wonderful man. He was a little dried-up fellow about like Spurlock, but he was smart, as distinct from Spurlock. [Laughter] He was meticulously dressed at all times, he was a good student. A good student of medicine. Oh, he got along pretty well.

The other man's name was Pulsifer. And he was said to be a drug addict; I don't know whether he was or not. But at any rate, Bates had all the business. Only two doctors. We had one veterinarian. There was no sewage system, every home was on a septic tank, and it was pretty odiferous, during a wet winter. Very often the septic tanks would fill up and overflow on the grass in the backyard. Now, the water supply came from one ten-thousand-gallon tank. And it sat on the gable of the big iron shed at Third and H. It was just across the railroad track east. Schmeizer Manufacturing Company (almond hullers) had their one ten-thousand-gallon tank sitting on the gable of this tin shed and supplied (it was supposed to supply) Davis with water. It did in the winter time.

In the summer, I have seen more than once a home burn up completely because there was no pressure. And, I've seen times when the water would not run in an upstairs bathroom. Not enough pressure to make it run; so, obviously, if the roof caught fire, it burned.

G.S.: Did anyone have their own windmills, in town, for the water? In one or two towns, I've seen rusted old windmills for their own water supply.

Wilson: Windows? Windmills, oh, windmills! Not in town, that I know of. We had some deep wells, but they were pumping water into this tank, now.

A.I.D.: What was the campus like? How many students, and so on?

Wilson: Well, the campus had, approximately, that first year I was here, about six hundred students. About five hundred and fifty of them were with the two-year curriculum. Now, they had just gotten out of the Army, pretty largely, and so had the instructors. The instructors were accustomed to giving orders, having no questions asked. The students were accustomed to taking orders in the Army, and they had had a belly full of it. They didn't want to take orders anymore from anybody. And this led to some very interesting situations.

Well, I'll just recall one. A thing which could never take place today. It would lead to arrests and fines. We had a fellow named Tom Tavernetti. He was assistant to the Dean. And, Tom Tavernetti was one of the stellar members of the boxing team when he was a student on the campus in Berkeley. And, we were registering students in a room called 110 Classroom Building. Which sat where one entrance to the library now is. And it was a big room--it was the biggest room on the campus. All the members of the faculty were there and the students all came there to be registered. There was this boy, he was new. He was a handsome duke, and all the girls were crazy about him in his hometown high school. He had the smarts pretty badly. And he was delayed getting through as everybody else was, of course. And finally he blew up and got mad. And he said that he would just like to take some of the damn faculty out and punch their faces in. Sitting about six feet away, working with another student, was Tom Tavernetti. Tom, turned around, looked at him over the top of his glasses, got up and went over there and he said, "I guess I'm the fellow you're talking about." And the boy saw that maybe he had made a mistake. He got up out of his seat, and he started for the door. Which was diametrically opposite the corner of the room where he was. He started for the door, and Tom right after him. And

Wilson: every other step Tom would clout him across the back of the head [Laughter] and he shot out the door and down the steps and out the front door, and Tom still after him. And Tom caught him at the bottom of the steps out front. He whirled him around and he said, "Well, I'd like to know if you would still like to lick the members of the faculty? I'm here and I'm offering my services." And, of course, the boy, he had to back down pretty fast. "Well," Tom said, "now I just happen to be the assistant to the Dean. I want your name, I want your Davis address. You are on probation as of this day." That was his introduction to school.

All right. That boy came from parents that had very little money, but he had an uncle who was quite well-to-do. The uncle had agreed to finance the boy through school, just as a gift. And, so this was the beginning of his career as a student. And the uncle was pretty hard-boiled. He was a tough one. And he was used to giving orders and having them followed. And the boy was scared to go back home. He just had to stay. And so he buckled down and went to work. And in a short while he was standing at the top of his classes; he got a job feeding cattle. He spent a whole winter out in the slop at six o'clock in the morning and six o'clock at night feeding a big bunch of steers and did a good job of it. And graduated so high in the two-year curriculum, that as a gift his uncle gave him a trip around the world as a present when he got through. Just another example of how you don't know what's good for you.

A.I.D.: What was your first position here?

Wilson: I was assistant professor of animal husbandry.

I'd like to relate a little incident now of a certain character because he was one of the dominant forces in this town for many years. His name was Del Greive. And Del Greive was raised an orphan by a Davis family. He was a fellow of very little schooling--formally. Natively very shrewd. He made a living by buying livestock, or trading livestock. He traveled around in an old buggy and he covered an area that was delineated by how far the mare could go in one day and get back to Davis. About once a week he made the rounds of our university barns. Asking if

Wilson: they had any surplus livestock that were going to market. And, he didn't know anything about the breeds of animals, but he learned awful fast.

Well, he went out to the sheep barn one time, and at that time, the Rambouillet breed, fine-wool sheep, were very popular in the area. They were the range sheep, the Merinos. And here was a Merino ram, and he had been fly-struck around the head and around the hind end. Now, there's no need for me to tell what fly-struck is, is there?

A.I.D.: You might.

Wilson: Fly-strike is occasioned by maggots that are laid, usually by eggs, sometimes viviparously by lucilia cuprina and lucilia sericata. And, the living larvae will get on the animal, and if they're not taken care of, they'll kill the animal if there's a heavy enough invasion. Now, the herdsman's name was Alex McDonald, and he was a typical Scottish herdsman. But there was enough to do so that he couldn't do it all. And he had been given an assistant, and the assistant was an Irishman named Feeney. And, I guess he was a typical Irishman. Witty and raising the Devil all the time. So Feeney had treated this ram for fly-strike, and when that was done, the only way we had at that time was to take a pair of sheep shears and clip the wool down close to the skin. And get him as nearly bare around the struck area as possible, and then put on a black substance called pine tar. "Pinetrel" it was called, I remember. And, the odor of that pinetrel would serve as a repellent and the bugs would be killed.

Well, Del went out there and he saw Feeney and pretty soon he looked around and there in the pen was this ram that had been fly-struck. And he saw this huge, big animal there and his head had been all shaved down, half-way down his neck because he'd been struck in the head. And, there it was, black as ink. Del looked at it and he says, "What kind of a sheep is that?" And of course, this was Feeney's opportunity. He says, "Why, don't you know what kind of a sheep that is? It's a Chinese sheep." Del says, "A Chinese sheep, the hell you say." "Yes," he says, "there are just three of them. They just come over, just a few days ago. There's this one here, and then there's one that went to the government in Washington, and I don't know what became of the third one, but I think it went to some-



Wool Laboratory, University of California,  
Davis about 1932



Graduate student, University of Missouri, 1915

Wilson: place in Montana." [Laughter] So Del looked and looked and looked. He said once again, "A Chinese sheep." And about that time the buck turned around so he had his hind end toward Del Greive. And his hind end had been treated the same way. And Del said, "Well, what in the world happened to him in the rear?" Feeney says, "Oh, he got his arse up against the steam pipes on the ship on the way over and burned him." [Laughter]

#### AGRICULTURE IN DAVIS AREA

Wilson: The agriculture around Davis in 1919 was based on dryland crops. Barley, primarily, was the grain to grow. The irrigated land, which was not very plentiful was used to grow alfalfa hay. Both crops were for livestock. If we had a good year, a lot of the barley was properly colored, that greenish cast that it gets, it was used for brewing. If it was not, it was used for feed barley. At any rate, those crops implemented the livestock business perfectly. Take off a crop of grain, send it to the warehouse in gunny bags and turn the livestock in to the stubble fields to graze on the aftermath. And, it was amazing how fat they got on it. Combines shattered a good deal, they were inefficient, and the crops were harvested by these giant combines--behemoths--that were sent down the field being pulled by teams of up to twenty mules. Being driven by a single jerk-line.

And, a good deal of the grain was shattered. And the livestock were turned in, and they did well, picking up the grain from the dirt. Sheep, especially, were adapted to it because their lips were thin and they could pick up these grains and their teeth were better adapted than the teeth of any other farm animal for handling hard grains, so they did remarkably well. There were always plenty of weeds in with it. There was wild lettuce, that furnished a little bit of succulence, and burr clover, medicago species. They did remarkably well on that. So one thing implemented the other.

Now, after the livestock got through, they'd trampled a good deal in with their feet and the rains came and the next year you got a volunteer crop without planting any

Wilson: more. Sometimes the volunteer crop was just about as good as the one you'd sown. The only other dryland crop that did well was called gyp corn. And that meant Egyptian corn. It was just milo maize. I recall, about the second or third year I was here, we put on a short course--three days--and at each of these short courses we had one outstanding man, presumably outstanding, to be the keynote speaker. And this particular year it was Morrison, the author of Morrison's Feeds and Feeding. He came out from Cornell University, and he remarked, in my presence, that he would love to be taken out where he could take a look at one of these combine harvesters. He had read about it; he'd seen pictures of them; he'd like to see one. I just happened to know that Frank Campbell, next door neighbor here at Campbell Ranch, was harvesting right then. One of the great mule-skinners of the area. And, so I said, "Just come with me right now." and there was the combine in the field and old Campbell sitting up there running it.

Another great mule Skinner was Rogers. They called him "Punkin" Rogers, and "Punk" Rogers was a Davis fellow. Red-headed, he was chairman of the Board of Supervisors later for several years. And, his widow only died a couple of years ago. They used to haul this grain. It was harvested in the field and put in sacks in the field by the machine, and then dumped, usually five sacks at a time. Then it'd be hauled out on wagons, and they'd hook six or eight wagons together and then have twelve to sixteen mules hauling the whole works with one driver. And, the driver drove with a jerk-line. Didn't have that many lines, didn't have each one controlled, but he drove with what was called a jerk-line. Rogers had an old lead mule, female, named Florey. He made a bet with somebody that he could turn this whole rig around at the intersection of the street at 2nd and G. That brick bank building was then quite new, and so a lot of money was bet on this and a big crowd turned out to watch it. And Punk started his turn over on the east side, and kept calling to old Florey, telling Florey what to do. And Florey kept going around and round, and round, and finally she was up on the sidewalk, and her nose was rubbing against the glass of the Bank of Davis, but he made the turn. [Laughter.]

Wilson: There were no commercial feedlots for livestock. I

Wilson: I don't think there was a single one in the state that I know of. It just wasn't done. I mean livestock were not fed that way. Now, we had so many herds and flocks of livestock, purebreds, that Professor True sat down and made a count of them. And including several breeders of registered poultry, there were one hundred eight herds and flocks of pure-bred livestock within twenty-five miles of Davis. He was in conversation with a man who was very prominent, named Fred Shaffer. And Fred Shaffer (that means a sheep-man, doesn't it, in German?) was quite a promoter of the area. And he listened to this tale of how many herd and flocks of registered livestock there were within a radius of twenty-five miles of Davis. Professor True had just gotten back from Chicago, and I think eight men came back with championship ribbons from the big Chicago live-stock show. And, he said, "Well, it's kind of a purple circle, isn't it?" And that's what coined the name "purple circle", Fred Shaffer. And, it became quite famous as the purple circle. And, if you wanted bucks, even if you were down near Bakersfield, and you wanted rams, you went to Davis, California, and you came up and saw somebody in animal husbandry and learned where the address of these people were and went out and bought the bucks from them.

G.S.: So that's the origin, then, of that long-time organization of pure-bred breeders called the purple circle, the pure-bred breeders club.

Wilson: And, it was said that in the entire United States, no other area could boast such a concentration of pure-bred live-stock. Then, gradually, here came the row-crop business. Starting out with sugar-beets, then with tomatoes; and, of course, it's axiomatic that you cannot compete with crops that can be fed directly to a human being. You can't use the same land to produce livestock and feed the live-stock to the human being with nearly so great efficiency as you can by growing something that the human can eat directly. So this just knocked the livestock business. And, it's been that way ever since. Pretty largely.

U. C. DAVIS

Wilson: You might ask why was the university farm--as it was then called--why was it put here? In Davis? They were offered

Wilson: a beautiful site over near Woodland, it's right along the main road between here and Woodland, and you can see the homes, there, lovely homes, and two giant palm trees, still living. But, they didn't put it there. They put it in Davis, because it was so essential to have communication between Davis and Berkeley. And, a lot of the classes were taught by people resident on the Berkeley campus, who commute back and forth and give lectures and go back to Berkeley. And Davis had twenty-four passenger trains a day. Going one way or the other. Well, of course, that settled it, and besides that, the land was darn good. It's in a good area.

So here we find ourselves, now, in 1919, with these great majors in the curriculum. Animal husbandry, agronomy, pomology, or fruit growing, and dairy industry. And, everything else was subservient to those four majors. English, olericulture; do you know what that is? Vegetable growing. History, math, irrigation, soils, and veterinary medicine.

G.S.: Was viticulture a branch of pomology in the first organization?

Wilson: No, that's right, I forgot viticulture. They were separate. We had a dean named Van Norman. And he was a lulu. He was later relieved, and not at his own request. And, at this juncture I would like to relate another thing.

We had a Billy Greive; now, this is not Del Greive, this is Del Greive's cousin. And, Bill Greive was, at one time, one of the worst drunks in Yolo County. And he quit. When he got his job at the university, they told him that he could have it until he got drunk once and then he was automatically fired. That was the last drink he ever took in his life.

G.S.: He was a great guy.

Wilson: Oh, he was a wonderful fellow. Well, he learned--he was employed really to drag the guts out. Hauling post-mortems. He learned to do all kinds of things working with these vets. He could go out to the barn, clean up a cow if she didn't get rid of her afterbirth; he could do as good a job as the vet would do because he'd had so much practice with it.

Wilson: He had a girl over there; her name was Peggy Martindale. And this girl was certainly different. She was a great big buster of a girl. And pretty nice looking. And she was the kind who was sort of an amazon-type. She'd do anything. She was loud. I wouldn't say she was lewd, but she was a little bit on the coarse order; but she knew just exactly when to quit, according to her reputation. And, she would go around with Bill Greive and with the veterinarians, and she would help them bleed hogs and played around in the slop and didn't mind it a bit. So, she and Bill were sent out to the hog barn in the autumn of the year. They were told to get these blood samples from the tails of some of the hogs. They were studying abortion--swine abortion. And, they had an old viticulturist, an old German. His name was Flossfeder; he was dour and unsmiling and he was all work and no play, as many Prussians are. Well, they got the--these two got the blood samples all taken. And it was the autumn of the year and the grapes were all ripe and there was a small patch of vineyard pretty close to the hog barn, and they decided that a few grapes would be pretty nice; so they just went up there and went in the vineyard and they were harvesting a few grapes. They looked up, and here was Flossfeder. He took one look, and he didn't come near them. He got close enough to see who it was, whirled around on his heel, and left. And, this girl says, "Bill, we're in trouble. He's going to go right to Dean Van Norman. We've got to think of something. And think of it fast." She did the thinking. They left there and went back down to the hog barn. They got a sow and chased her up the alley and turned her into the vineyard. And then they just stayed there.

And pretty soon here's Flossfeder back and he says, "Mr. Greif, Mr. Greif, Dean Van Norman wants to see you immediately." Bill says, "Okay." He went down to the Dean's office. The Dean didn't even ask him a question. He just took the shirt off Bill's back. He just gave him Hell for stealing grapes. When he got all through with this big speech, Bill said, "Well, now, it's true that we were in the vineyard. But we weren't in there to steal grapes; we didn't care anything about the grapes. We were looking for a sow that was lost." And, of course this left Van Norman not a word to say. He was just flabber-gasted. Well, the upshot of the whole thing was unbelievable. [Chuckle.] Van Norman, extricating himself, got Flossfeder

Wilson: and Bill Greive both down there on the carpet in front of him at one time. And made Flossfeder apologize to Bill Greive. That's the way it turned out. Flossfeder apologizing to Bill Greive. I told Bill later, "You're the damndest crook in the whole county, and you know it."

[Laughter.]

Okay, now. The big thing on campus was the boxing team, and we had the darndest bunch of fighting farmers you ever saw. They'd take on Stanford and Cal Berkeley and any of these others and beat them. We gave instruction in accordance with animal husbandry instruction, prevailing all over the United States at that time. It was very important to have a judging team and send the judging team to major shows like the one in Portland and Kansas City Royal International and to compete with the other outstanding judging teams. We were doing it right along. The courses given were what we call production courses. You took courses in beef production, horse production, swine production, and sheep production. And so forth. Whether you were in degree work or the two-year curriculum. Now it was later shown this policy of teaching those courses was criticized very severely by some people in the Berkeley campus, primarily. They said it was not university work. It had nothing to do with university standards, and should be stopped; and students should be taught only the scientific aspects of it. And, if they wanted to learn anything else, let them go out and go to work for somebody on a ranch. Well, we were pretty bitter about that; we didn't believe it. Nevertheless, in an effort to placate everybody, these courses were changed somewhat and, in the end, the production courses were pretty largely stopped. I assume that they haven't been resuscitated.

G.S.: Not a great deal. There are some production aspects given, but they're--

Wilson: All right. Livestock judging teams can have a baleful influence on an industry. Our cattlemen and sheepmen and hogmen at various times have gone after these compact animals. We went through a long period here when the great desideratum in beef production was to get these compact cattle. And, it was almost disastrous. One thing that you lose, and the loss is permanent, is the size. You can't recover the size if you lose that. You can recover

Wilson: some other things if you lose, but not that. And, it just almost ruined the industry. Took a long time to get over that. The only reason it got over it was that not all cattle breeders fell for it. They stopped showing. They couldn't win anything in show rings so they just stopped showing. They did the same thing with these great Merino sheep and other breeds, the Hampshire sheep, and the Shropshires. To win in the show ring they had to have low caps, clear down over their faces, be woolled almost to the teeth. The reason for this was, ostensibly, that you wanted density. Density of fleece. And if you got it dense enough, so that there wasn't anymore room on there for anymore wool fibers, they'd just naturally squeeze out and they'd come down on the face. [Laughter.]

Then, you'd turn them out into places like the stubble fields out here and they'd get into a foxtail bunch--a foxtail pasture--and the first thing you'd know the foxtail seeds would shatter and get in their wool around the eyes and then into the eyeball, and you'd have a blind sheep. So this all had to be corrected later.

G.S.: Jim, wasn't the emphasis on the short, chubby hog the same thing?

Wilson: Very same thing. That's what ruined the Berkshire breed. Breeding these little butter-balls. Well, of course, they had another reason there, with the hogs. The vegetable oil business came along. Competition with lard.

Well, another example is schools of forestry. They got in bad. I remember when everybody was knocking the foresters. All they did was to go out and teach kids how to count stumppage. The number of board feet.

All right now, about True, Gordon H. True. Professor True believed heart and soul in the practical aspects of animal husbandry. He was a very far-seeing man as regards the needs of an industry. He was a fine man, morally, a fine example for young people. He foresaw that some day the State of California would develop into a great livestock feeding state, where we'd be feeding animals in dry-lot. And he was bold enough to say it publicly that California was going to develop this way.

Wilson: We had at that time two of the most powerful men in California agriculture: H. A. Jastro, who was general manager of Kern County Land at Bakersfield and Fred Bixby, who was a range cattle man in somewhat the same area. These men were in the business of turning out grass-fed cattle, that is cattle that never had any dry-lot experience in their lives; they were just taken off grass at the age of three years and sent to market. When True said that California would develop into a great livestock feeding state, they saw immediately that if this happened, the popularity of grass-fed beef would go down, because everybody would want to have grain-fed beef. It's so much more tender. It goes to market at a much earlier age, and the fat globules are deposited throughout the meat, which enhances the flavor. So they went after Gordon H. True. And they did such a superb job of undermining him that he was not fired; but he was relieved of the job of being head of the department and sent down to Berkeley to waste his substance in a little office, doing as he chose to do, but with no authority. It broke his heart, and he died, I think, in 1927 or '8 of a broken heart. That was about the size of it.

At that time they sent George Hart up. When True was taken out of here, they sent George Hart up with instructions that he was to clean out the Department of Animal Husbandry. Hart came up and, at the end of about two months, he said he was all through with the cleaning process. And, far from cleaning out the men that were there, he said to give him six scientists who were as good as those fellows are, and he said, I won't ask for anything else. And he conceived this idea of making the balance between the production men and the basic scientists. And that's what brought in Harold Goss, as a biochemist, and Max Kleiber and Gregory, the geneticist, and Harold Cole.

And Harold Cole, the physiologist, that's what brought them in. I still think it was a darn good system, but it's all gone now, I guess. They've got all these different departments and Bill Weir has gone over now to being head of the Department of Nutrition. And we have a Department of Genetics. Is there anything left of Animal Husbandry now?

G.S.: Many of the physiologists have gone over to the Department of Physiology. They have tie-ups there. Boda is gone and Vern Mendel went over there. Mendel went over there as head of physiology. So that--

Wilson: Mendel?

G.S.: Mendel. And then they have Magnar Ronnings who became assistant to the dean.

Wilson: What's his name?

G.S.: Mag Ronning, Dr. Ronning. And he was former head of Animal Science before Eric Bradford came in to be head. And, of course, the unfortunate thing is that as soon as we lose a man from teaching and research into even the department head position, you lose most of his work in regard to teaching and research. You can't do it. He's loaded.

A.I.D.: How did they handle research with the scientists and the production men? Were there joint publications?

Wilson: Yes, joint publications. It would depend on who did the major part of it.

G.S.: Well, they had single publications in addition, but the joint work was handled that way.

Wilson: Yes, oh yes. Just depended on who did the work. And, I never heard of a case of anybody getting mad, except Gregory. And nobody could work with that man. Couldn't do anything with him. He even went out and put a padlock on his roll-top desk, with a hasp and a big padlock on it so he could lock it up when he went home to lunch and when he went home at night to keep other members of the department from putting their noses into his desk--as if they wanted to.

Is he still living?

G.S.: Yes, he's in Oregon, now. Remarried.

Wilson: Yes, I knew he'd gotten married.

A.I.D.: What were your major research projects?

Wilson: We did a lot of research work; we got data which were not published up until the time that I left. I was not a fellow that turned out masses of papers. In fact, I did very few. My main contribution was in gadgets for other people to use. And they became standard over the country, like that wool scouring business.

G.S.: And the duster?

Wilson: And the duster to open the wool up previous to scouring and the centrifugal dryer. Well, I invented all those.

G.S.: You did an early baler, when wool-sacks got scarce. That was during World War II, early World War II, wasn't it?

Wilson: When the supply of jute from the Indian Ocean was shut off by the Japanese, it looked like we were going to have to haul wool to market in loose wagons. Yes, I made a baler. Had one working with cardboard and one with baling wire.

A.I.D.: I want to ask something. Was Ira Smith here when you came?

Wilson: Oh yes, he was a bookkeeper. Sitting up on a high stool over in the Controller's Office.

A.I.D.: Did you ever have any run-ins with Ira?

Wilson: No, he and I got along well. I used to tell him off once in awhile; I could do it. He never resented it if I told him off. He was a guy you couldn't stay mad at to save your life. He'd do these preposterous things and he was a powerful man. But, we took on a new tract of land. And a lot of it was to be devoted to irrigated pastures; that's what we in Animal Husbandry were looking for. We couldn't get it done, because Ira was in charge of all the unallocated land. He put in a crop of grain and then you couldn't do anything until that grain crop was harvested; and that would be the end of July, you see. And, at the end of July, have a little delay getting the rigs in. Then the first thing you know he couldn't do it because it might rain, and if it rained when the rigs were in the field, they might have to stay there until spring. So this went on about three years, and I finally blew up.

Wilson: And I went over to see Ira, and he said, "Now you know, Jim, just as well as I do, what would happen. Get those big rigs in there to level the land and the rains would come and then where would you be?" I said, "Ira, I remember the first year I was here, when the first rains came on the twelfth of December. And the trouble with you is, that you think you know more than God Almighty does." He said, "No, I don't now, Jim; that's an unfair thing. I don't think that I know more than God Almighty does, but me and God work awful close together." [Laughter.]

A.I.D.: Did he come down sick one time from some diseased sheep?

Wilson: Yes, and I'm the fellow that gave it to him.

A.I.D.: What was that story?

Wilson: Q-fever. I introduced Q-fever to the United States and damn near killed myself and a lot of others. Queensland fever.

A.I.D.: From Australia?

Wilson: Yes, from Australia. I got over a bunch of sheep from Australia, Border Leicesters. Rams, darn good ones, too. Gosh, they were nice. And first thing you know, people were dropping around us. And it was diagnosed properly. They sent a team of epidemiologists in here. And, of course, they interviewed me, and when they got through I'd had it and gotten over it. Felt sure that I was going to die. It hit me in the chest. So, I said to the epidemiologist, "Now, I'd like to know how good your story is." "Well," he said, "not too good." We tried to piece everything together, but we have to admit there are some who have it, who have nothing to do with the sheep business. For instance, your controller over here, Ira Smith; he's not a sheep man. I said, "Oh, the hell he isn't. He's out in the sheep barn all the time. And he was out there in the last ten days, looking at these sheep." Well, this was quite a shocker to them.

Well, then, your express man, Fred Michaels, he had it. [Fred died about three weeks ago, in his nineties.] And I said, "Yes, he had it, and he shipped out, by express, a bunch of rams that I shipped; he handled them." So every

Wilson: time they turned around, the story was the same. Hubert Heitman got it and he should have kept it. He lost about ten inches around his big old fat belly.

A.I.D.: As you look back over your professional life, and as you remember what you hoped to accomplish at the beginning of your career, and looking at it over those many years, what accomplishments have pleased you the most?

Wilson: I don't think I can answer that. I just don't think I can answer. I can't assess that question properly or answer it properly.

A.I.D.: Well, let me put it this way. Did you enjoy teaching more, did you feel that you--

Wilson: Ah, yes, if you put it that way, yes. I did. I took a great interest in students. I took more interest in students than I did in research work. I liked both of them. I really like students and I worked hard to serve them. I was never too busy to stop and help a student out.

G.S.: Now, many of your students that I've talked to have considered you the best teacher they've ever had. If you were advising young faculty on their teaching duties, what advice would you give them?

Wilson: Well, in the first place, I would say, if you're going to give a lecture, you be sure that you rehearse this lecture every time before you go in the classroom. Don't assume that because you gave this lecture last year that you can walk in there, cold turkey, and give the same thing again without reviewing it. Because just as sure as you do, some guy in that class, who is smarter than you are, is going to ask a question that you should know and you can't answer and it's going to be very embarrassing.

Another thing that I learned from experience is always be completely fair with the students. I was once abused by a university professor. And it made me so sensitive that I vowed right then that if I ever dealt with students I would go the last mile to give them the benefit of the doubt. Now, there were some cases when I had some students that I sure put the screws on awful hard, when I found out they were crooks. I kept one of them from graduating from

Wilson: the university when he was just ready to walk out with a degree and into the United States Army as an officer. And I kept him from doing that. Got him put off of the list of Army officers, and I never regretted it. As a matter of fact, years later, that fellow came up to me and thanked me for what I did. I couldn't believe it.

G.S.: I know that you were very active, Jim, in advising students. When I first came to the university in '56, there were students coming in to see you then, yet in sizable numbers. And I happened to be in there at times when you were talking to them. And in two or three instances I remember that the student was just trying to get away with something, or get by as easy as he could. You told him in no uncertain terms what he was doing. I was impressed by your direct statements to him. Because you spelled it out, so that they weren't able to beat around the bush and just palm it all off.

Wilson: I don't believe in that. You've got to face a problem.

I recall a quotation that I read that had quite an effect on me. That was, "You cannot run away from a weakness; someday you must fight it out. And, if that be true, why not now and where you stand?"

G.S.: That's very good.

Wilson: You bet it's good.

G.S.: Well, I know that you were an outstanding teacher and I guess even out in the field men that are pretty far along in age will ask me, "How's Jim Wilson, how's he doing, is he still around there, how long has it been that Jim retired?" People still asking about you as if you ought to be back at the university working and they just haven't had a chance to get back here yet. But they took for granted that you're right here close.

Wilson: Wouldn't I be a dandy to try to teach now?

G.S.: But, they are always telling about how much they enjoyed your classes.

A.I.D.: What were the classes in? What was the subject?

Wilson: Well, at various times I taught various subjects. In my earlier days I taught feeds and feeding, and that was quite a job. The classes were big and were required subjects. And then I taught animal breeding for several years; that was just applied genetics. I was not a geneticist, I just knew more genetics than the students. And then I taught sheep production and wool technology. And then, for years, I confined teaching to wool technology--explaining these things and what they really meant. And how one grade was not a very definite hard and fast number of microns in diameter of the wool fiber, but one grade overlapped the other. Things of that kind, that I thought was of value to them; and then, why this and why that, from a manufacturing standpoint. Because I'd had a lot of training at Lowell Textile School.

G.S.: Well, that showed up there. I remember the section on defects--of the kinds of defective material that clip picked up that was concerned with management in this.

Wilson: Defects. Defect in the wool trade means vegetable matter in the wool. And a lot of them didn't know that. And I remember putting a great deal of time in on this long set of definitions, teaching them how to interpret a wool market report. How to interpret it. Why, they wouldn't have any idea what those words meant. So different from the meat business.

G.S.: Well, I think part of the difficulty is that I think wool manufacturing and the wool, principal wool trade, is divorced from production. When the clip leaves the producers' hands--

Wilson: That's right. And I tried to get these two together, by going from Lowell Textile School. I had this project to see whether or not a single fleece of wool could be converted into a manufactured article. And I did it. I mean I turned out combed top on a French comb from a series of individual fleeces. That never had been done before. It couldn't be done on an oval comb, either, because you've got seventy-two ends on a Noble comb and you've got only twenty-four ends on a French comb. And, in addition to that, the French comb will run on any number up to twenty-four. The Noble comb had to have seventy-two to operate at all.

G.S.: I remember in this circular on wool production you discussed the principal steps of manufacture, and this was one of the few places that a grower--well, the ordinary grower--could go, the only place he could go to find out what happens to the fleece when it leaves his... What are the steps it goes through? They didn't know a woolen from a worsted. Or a felt. Or anything else. They had no way of knowing this. They were just too far away from the East Coast where manufacturing occurred.

Wilson: The first thing that happened on that bulletin that I handed out. A fellow down in San Francisco called me up. He was a wool dealer. I didn't know him too intimately, but I knew him somewhat. He said, "Now are you the person who wrote that thing?" And I said, "Yes, I did, what's wrong with it?" He says, "Wrong with it? I want to get some more. Where can I go to get them?" "Well," I said, "all you have to do is write in for them; they're free of charge."--which they were then--"How many do you want?" He says, "I want to get five hundred of them." [Laughter.] Give one to every customer. All right, Glen.

G.S.: One other publication of yours that really stands out had some entertaining aspects. I know you did a book on the agriculture of Santa Cruz Island with Earl Warren, Jr. And then out of that came a paper for the National Wool Growers and the Great Sheep Tail Mystery. Why don't you tell us something about that?

Wilson: Well, I didn't know a thing in the world about these channel island sheep. I call them the channel islands, the Santa Barbara group. And after young Warren became one of my students, he mentioned it one day. About these wild sheep. And, gosh, my ears just flew up like an old jackass, you know. I said, "Tell me more, where did they come from?" He said, "Nobody knows where they come from but they're probably let off by the early day sailing vessels that came around the Horn and then up the coast, and if they had a good run they would have some animals left over, and before they went home, they'd just let the animals off on some convenient place and hope that they would multiply and their offspring would be there if they ever had a bad run when they came back." So that's the way these sheep got on that island. So I said, "My golly, I'd like to go down there and see those." "Well," he says, "I think I can

Wilson: arrange it, maybe. This is once I'll get my Dad to do something." So the next thing I knew, I was invited to go along. We went down there to that crazy little port, Port Hueneme, and the owner of the island was there. He greeted us, and he treated us royally. My golly, he really laid out the red carpet for me. He took us out the next day, and I got in good with him right away. He was trying to get rid of the wild pigs on that island. And there were a lot of them. And they were just rooting up everything. And, I told you I had a lot of experience shooting. Well, we were going along in this jeep, and there was a 30-caliber carbine hanging in a scabbard up on the windshield. All of a sudden we flushed a bunch of these wild pigs unexpectedly. They took off and up the hill. And he slammed the brakes on, and I grabbed this gun out. I killed four of those things on the dead run before they got to the top of the hill. [Laughter.] And he was just tickled to death.

Well, we saw these sheep. And they were in the most inaccessible canyons. We had to study them with field glasses. We couldn't get near them at all. They were really wild animals. You see these ewes with a little lamb, maybe a month old at her side, just practically clinging to a precipice like these mountain goats do up here. So, we couldn't get a living animal. But fortunately he had quite a pile of pelts. All the men on the ranch had been told if you see a sheep, shoot it. And so they had these pelts there. And young Earl Warren made a study of the pelts, wrote a paper on it, did an excellent job. And, we were told later that some men came in there and they asked for permission to make a try to get these sheep. With the understanding that they would put the money in, they would furnish all the expenses, but they would get the sheep. By golly, they did. They brought them out of there; they got a large number of them, several hundreds. At one shot, by putting up one of these fence-line traps. Shooting them down long wing. And, they proved very definitely that they were Merinos. They were up to seventies count on the wool. They were kind of run out at the britch, which you might expect. But one thing they showed, that was amazing to me--I'd never heard of it before--if the lambs went undocked, which of course they did, not always, but very, very often, the ewe would turn around and gnaw the tail off that lamb. Just chew it

Wilson: right off. Dock it herself.

G.S.: Well then, some of them, when they got to be yearling age, they had no wool on the tail. They had a little bit of short fuzz, or something.

Wilson: That's right, they did. And over in Europe, I found a breed of sheep that had that same characteristic. A German called the breed "Weisskopfige Fleischschaf". White-headed mutton sheep. They were a renegade outfit with one redeeming characteristic. They produced their first lambs as yearlings and nearly always had twins on the first throw, and, thereafter, nearly always had triplets. All right.

G.S.: I think your greatest contribution over the years, Jim, has been in teaching and what you've handed on to students, and, not only the subject matter and material, but the way they went after tasks and things.

Wilson: Now, Glen, I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I was a great teacher.

G.S.: Well, I maintain you are, because I had firsthand experience. You know, I don't know if you remember or not, but I audited the only course in animal husbandry that I was ever privileged to take, I took for non-credit from you and that was wool technology. Along with about thirty-five or forty students; and it was probably because of that, that I came back and joined the department later when they wanted somebody to help on teaching.

Wilson: I'll tell you what I'd appreciate your doing. And you could do it, Glen. If you want to get an assessment of my value as a teacher, I'll give you three names; you can get in contact with them. They are men whose judgment is usually pretty good. They will come right out and tell you, well, he was pretty good, but so and so. One of them is Bud Marsh. And Bud Marsh is Vice-President of the National Wool Growers Association. He's still in the business. Another one is young Earl Warren. And you can get his address right out of the phone book there, in your own office. The third one, who for some reason made it a point to get opinions on this very subject, is Rube. I don't know why he did it, but he let me know one time what

Wilson: some of the people thought of me. There's three, Rube Albaugh.

G.S.: Well, you know, Rube doesn't beat around the bush. He comes out and says so very directly. So, I'll follow up on that.

Wilson: You get it from them. It would not be seemly for me to do it. All I'll say is this. Even after all the years that I'd had of experience, I never went into the classroom to give a lecture that I hadn't--that I didn't--review what I was going to say and rehearse it, and try to see if I could formulate it in such a way as to make it clearer. And, I had reason for doing this. Because I found one time that I'd put a quiz on the board. I wrote it out. I'd studied the questions myself. When the blue books came back, one question was all balled up by everybody. And I said to two or three of these kids, "What in the world happened to you, anyway?" "Well, nothing. We answered it the way you asked it." "No, you didn't." They proved to me that the thing was so ambiguously worded that, hell, if I'd stopped to think about it, I couldn't have answered it myself. So, that was quite a jolt to me. Right there. Be careful. And you go in there unprepared and, as sure as you do, some darn student, who is a lot smarter than you are is going to ask a question that you can't answer and it'll be something you should answer, too.

#### SHEEP AND WOOL ACTIVITY

G.S.: But another thing that you were active over the years was as a collaborator for the Dubois Station. And the sheep and wool advisory committee to the USDA. I think this was a pronounced leadership role.

Wilson: Oh, I suppose I had a few kudos thrown my way, I guess, at various times. I suppose that everybody does if he stays with it long enough. I was an honorary director of the California Wool Growers. I was selected by the USDA to be the official representative of the California experiment station in deciding research policies of the U. S. sheep experiment station at Dubois. I was also, until they shut the work down, that one up there in Miles City, Montana.

G.S.: Did you have anything to do with the Fort Wingate station, Jim?

Wilson: No, I had nothing to do with that. In fact, I didn't agree at all with most of the work they were doing down there, trying to introduce Romney blood into a climate like that. Crazy. Well, then, I guess the greatest honor that I had was being selected to serve on that national sheep and wool advisory committee. I was on there for what?--I think eight years.

A.I.D.: You were a member of the American Society of Animal Production, the American Genetic Association, as well as the Wool Growers Association, in which you were an honorary director. Were you active in those societies?

Wilson: I was somewhat active in all of them.

G.S.: Now, Jim, this was before my time, but it's my understanding that you were the instigator or principal organizer of the California Ram Sale, through early work with the wool growing industry.

Wilson: That's right, I originated it.

G.S.: How did that start?

Wilson: Well, like so many other things, it started with Gordon H. True. True was the one who said that we would be doing a great service to the industry if we would bring these fellows down here and put on a ram sale and show them what good rams are. Well, that's all he needed to say to me. I agreed and I went right after it, and we organized a sale. After I'd had a conference with that sheep man up there at Red Bluff, Fred Ellenwood. He agreed. So we started in.

Well, I was young and I was strong and, gosh, I used to go out and buy the hay and have the hay delivered and I'd pile it. I would erect the pens and drive the two-by-four stakes with a sledge hammer and swing the damn sledge all day.

G.S.: This was for the sale here at Davis?

Wilson: Yes, we held it here. And, nearly all the bucks were local, because this was in the hey-day of the purple circle, you see. So, when four o'clock would come around, I'd knock the sale off. The auctioneer would quit for the day and the fellows all had to go home and pail the cows and I would feed and water all the sheep on the ground. I hired the auctioneer. Those were great days. And, it worked.

G.S.: Still going strong.

Wilson: There were the Oestes out here. This old Oestes Ranch. They had darn good sheep, very good sheep. I asked them if they wouldn't like to put in some bucks into this sale. Well, no, no, they wouldn't do that. They were misers, you know, of the first order. They had been out there selling rams, top-notch registered rams, thirty dollars a head, and glad to get that much. But they were on hand when the sale was held. They wouldn't put anything in, but there was a neighbor, Frank Campbell, and Campbell said yes, he'd put in a few. So he put in some and they went for seventy-five dollars a head. Oh, they were busters, great big bucks, and then here came the Oestes; oh boy, they were crying their eyes out.

G.S.: Were the Bullard Brothers in operation then in Woodland? The Rambouilletts?

Wilson: Oh my, yes, they were among the premier Rambouillet breeders of America.

G.S.: I didn't know when they started, though.

Wilson: Well, they started long before I came here. That was the first place I went to after I got here. On the first Saturday, I went out to Bullard Brothers.

G.S.: There was a Romney breeder up there, wasn't there?

Wilson: A Romney breeder? Yes, there was Dr. Brownell. And Dr. Brownell got these Romneys at the close of the Panama Pacific Exposition. And he took them to Woodland. They were sent over by a bunch of New Zealand breeders. And they didn't want to ship them home. So the doctor took them and kept them over here for several years. And we had

Wilson: a flock here at Davis, at the University, but they were not adapted to this climate.

But that time Bobby Miller came back. See, he was gone just a year. He went down to Texas and stayed a year and then came back.

G.S.: Oh, I didn't know that.

Wilson: And Bobby and I never had a cross word together. We worked together for years. We both saw that the Romney was never going to make it in the Sacramento Valley. We had a little conference and decided that they belonged up there around Ferndale.

G.S.: Exactly were they belong, too.

Wilson: Because that was pretty close to the climate of New Zealand. And, we persuaded old man Russ. Does the name Russ mean anything to you?

G.S.: Oh yes, sure. The Russ family is still going strong.

Wilson: We persuaded Russ to try them. He had Cotswolds up there. Of all things. There's hardly a Cotswold sheep left in the world. But he was trying them. And he tried these Romneys and, boy, he went nuts. The next year he went back to Chicago and he bought every Romney sheep that he could buy back there.

William Russ, this was. And, well, if he were living today, he'd be close to a hundred years old.

G.S.: Must be--this is one we call Old Joe Russ; it must have been either his father or his grandfather. Because I think his father was named Joe too, if I remember correctly.

Wilson: Probably his grandfather.

At the time we were running these sheep and wool schools, by and large, the average sheep man in California was doing just the opposite of what he should have been doing. And Bobby Miller and I knew it. They were using Blackface rams, which meant Suffolk and Hampshire rams, to breed to these fine-wool ewes or ewes carrying a heavy

Wilson: infusion of fine-wool blood. And then, when it came to replacement of stock to keep for themselves to perpetuate the kind, they were keeping these cross-bred Blackfaces. And the cross-bred Blackfaces produce so little wool that it's just pitiful, as compared with the cross-bred fine-wools. And they are not as prolific; they won't stand the abuse as much as those carrying fine-wool blood. So our plea was when you go to replace your stock, instead of keeping these cross-bred Blackfaces, if you don't want to go out and buy new sheep and ship them in here from Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho, then use some ram of a suitable breed so that you can raise your own replacements and raise the right kind.

G.S.: They were sacrificing longevity, too, in the Blackface cross.

Wilson: Yes, we had quite a story all fixed up for them.

Wilson: Then we would demonstrate it out on the ranches. And get a big crowd there. They seemed to be very popular.

G.S.: Well, they still talk about them.

Wilson: And this was carried on every year for years, even into Nevada. I went to Australia three times. Believe me, when you go to Australia, you don't go down there to teach them anything. You go down there to learn.

A.I.D.: Did you get over to New Zealand?

Wilson: Yes, got to New Zealand. Been all over New Zealand twice. Wonderful country. But there's where the Romney sheep is paramount. It's a wet weather sheep.

G.S.: Didn't you help bring in a Romney ram or two from New Zealand?

Wilson: Yes, I brought in several.

G.S.: I know you brought in New Zealand Merinos and had a project on the Australian Merino crosses. And you got special permission for bringing Australian Merinos, didn't you, for experimental use?

Wilson: Yes, I had to. Oh, they had an embargo that lasted for twenty-five to thirty years. You were not allowed to ship a Merino sheep out of Australia.

G.S.: And you had something to do with their lifting that embargo?

Wilson: Yes, I never quit trying and one time it worked. The farm advisor of Mendocino County, Russell Foote, did a lot, too. He's the one who finally tipped the scales. After I'd been writing and begging and so forth, Russ Foote went down. [And incidentally, poor old Foote is now in a nursing home.]

G.S.: What were the sheep like that were here in California when you came here, and about what level of production, and then, what sort of programs did you have? I wanted to give you a chance to talk about your improvement programs and sheep which I think have been outstanding; and I know that the industry has appreciated them to beat the band.

Wilson: Well, the sheep that were here in the valley when I came were pretty largely Shropshires. This was an entirely different kind of a Shropshire than we have today. These were big sheep and they were long-bodied sheep. And very straight-back and they had very little wool on their faces. Rams would weigh two hundred fifty, two hundred seventy-five; that is a big sheep. And then the fine-wool sheep were grown on the ranges. They were largely Rambouilletts and those in the production flatlands. These fine-wool ewes were kept because of their prolificacy, their capacity to breed in hot weather and their longevity. And they would breed those to these Blackface Shropshires and get lambs to sell to the butcher.

Wilson: Foster Ranch, down here at Sonoma, ran ten thousand head of Shropshires. And, every sheep spent his life in a certain pasture and was taken out of the pasture only to be shorn. And sent back again.

G.S.: I was going to mention that right soon after 1920 was when my family got into sheep for the first time, in Glenn County. We started there. And I remember that my dad was buying Hamp-Shrop cross rams that he liked the best of all. They were big blocky animals, and there were even some Hamp-Southdown crosses, which were big. Not like these

G.S.: little dwarf Southdowns that we have today. And, as I recall, a lamb's weight would be maybe eighty pounds-- eighty-five pound fat lambs--but we sold them. We didn't feed out lambs like they do today, and we didn't have nearly the feed. Unless you had a natural range or a real good feed year. But I don't remember anything being done in that area, that is, where I was around, toward improvement, except the purchase of these mutton-type bucks, which were an improvement for meat production, but didn't improve wool production. But--

Wilson: But over on the coast they didn't use Rambouilletts. They didn't use Blackfaces, either. They used their own particular kind of a Merino. As distinct from a Rambouillet. There were no Rambouillet flocks over there. These Merinos that they had were smaller, usually about eighty to eighty-five pounds, and a few of them up to a hundred. They were tough. They had to be tough to live over there. That was a wet country, too, in the wintertime.

G.S.: Frank Clarke was an early improver in Northern Mendocino, wasn't he?

Wilson: Yes, he sure was.

G.S.: And his flock was quite well-known, his clip was well-known. He had small Merinos, but very well adapted to that country. Now, he was in a pretty high rainfall area, too, wasn't he?

Wilson: Well, yes, fifty inches a year; that's pretty high.

G.S.: Well over four feet.

Wilson: Now, it was the disadvantages, the shortcomings of those coast Merinos that got me started on the program of trying to do something about it. I recognized that they were not big enough, that they were very light in wool production, that the fleeces were very short-stapled and...

G.S.: They had lots of wrinkles, too.

Wilson: They had lots of wrinkles.

So, I started in making a collection of Merino sheep,

Wilson: the strains that were available to me. I didn't go down to South America, or anything, but I had Delaine Merinos, twenty-five ewes and a ram, out of Ohio, and Tasmanian Merinos that I got through the Department of Agriculture; they'd had them at Dubois. I got all those. I got Black top Merinos out of Michigan and shipped them out here. Then, I went to New Zealand and got some New Zealand Merinos and finally got some out of Australia. So there were five different strains that we tried. Now you asked about the sheep and wool school.

G.S.: Yes, specifically, your programs for improvement at the local level, where I know that you conducted a great many of these over the state. And I've heard people in the industry, old timers, talk about them, and how much they enjoyed them. And they were really impressed with the information they got from you on wool improvement, particularly, but also on general management of the sheep.

Wilson: Our policy was to try out these strains of Merinos here at Davis, because we could control things so much better than they could any place else. And, we would give them a go here for two or three years. And in that time we'd grow out some of these rams.

G.S.: They went off to producers to different parts of the area, and I can see that also there's been another method of spread, because ewe lambs out of those rams were sold as replacements to operators who were newcomers to the business and that sort of thing.

Wilson: And then, if the right kind of a man came along, we loaned him rams. From here. Free of charge. He had to agree to bring them back, and he would.

G.S.: Well, about a very good friend of yours, every time I see him in San Joaquin, named John Nahrbeitz.

Wilson: Oh, yes. Johnny Nahrbeitz.

G.S.: He always asks about you and he remarks on the very fine, beautiful ewes that he raised out of some of the Mayard Merino rams he got from you. The New Zealand Merino stock. And he still remembers the quality and the length and the low-shrinking characteristics of that wool. The beauty

G.S.: of the staple.

You pretty well covered the San Joaquin Valley and the Sacramento and the coast range on your wool schools. Did you ever get up with any of them into Modoc or the Scott River Valley and Siskiyou?

Wilson: Oh, yes. We went to Modoc County several times. Alturas. And I think only once to Siskiyou.

G.S.: There are only a few small flocks there.

Wilson: Our program was very popular in Modoc. We didn't do so much in Humbolt. They had a different kind of sheep; got along pretty well, anyway. But we did have some work going on. We conducted demonstrations and things at that big fair that they have up there at Rohnert Park, out at Ferndale.

G.S.: Oh yes, beautiful town, Ferndale.

Wilson: All right.

G.S.: They had an awful lot of trouble with scabies in sheep. Were you concerned in any of those programs? Did the university ever pick it up here at Davis?

Wilson: And get scabies?

G.S.: And get scabies in any of the sheep here.

Wilson: No, not that I know of. But scabies was very common in the flocks of the state. And the State Department of Agriculture, of course, are the ones involved there, not the university. And they went after it, hammer and tongs. And, of course, they got this law passed, which was very distasteful to some people. And that was, that if you've got scabies and didn't report it, they would raise the devil with you. If you did report it, you had nothing more to say about it. They would tell you what you were going to do, instead of asking you what you felt you ought to do. They tell you what you're going to do.

Nevertheless, that's what drove scabies out of California. And then we had an invasion of these blue foot-lice. Gee,

Wilson: that was something.

G.S.: Then, I was thinking about the foot and mouth outbreak. That was when I was just a kid. The animosity of the growers to this program of shooting and burying cattle and sheep. They were all up in arms, but they finally came around and followed through and got it cleaned up. That was a tremendous program that was like the scabies clean-up.

Wilson: Yes, I was in on that. They suggested that it would be nice to have the university collaborate in some way, if for no other reason than to make it more official and placate some of the people that were bitter. And so, I was selected. And I have to admit, I could shoot in those days. And so they asked me what I thought I could do. And, I said, "I can kill cattle. Give me a rifle." And I stayed up there all one day and shot these things. I never had to shoot twice at any of them; I could get them all right. But it was the most distasteful thing I have ever done. You take a little calf, about two months old, you know, down in the trench and looking at you, and have to put a bullet between his eyes. Very distasteful. So then I told them I didn't want to do that anymore. And I got the job putting the cape on. That's to disinfect the people who came in out of the field so they wouldn't be spreading foot and mouth disease around. And, I recall one old guy who was a veterinarian who came in to observe. And he weighed about two hundred eighty pounds, and he was just in everybody's way. Stupid. And they wanted him to go home, but he wouldn't go home. So I said, "That'll be my job. I'll see that he gets home." So, when he came in there that night, I put the cape on to disinfect him. It was a great big rubber poncho, and you put these pellets in a pan underneath to generate this gas. And you have to be a little careful how long you give it to them.

G.S.: What was it, SO<sub>2</sub>?

Wilson: I guess it was. Must have been. At any rate, I got him under the cape and I just doubled the dose. And then I doubled the time. And he got out of there and pretty soon he started to itch. And his old legs were that big around, you know. And he just rubbed himself raw between his legs there, going like this. [Laughter.] He had to go home.

G.S.: Jim, what sort of a wool clip did the average ewe produce at the time you came here? In terms of pounds.

Wilson: Oh, it was about six and a half pounds.

G.S.: Six and a half pounds. This contrasts with somewhere between nine and ten for the average for the state. They estimate right now.

Wilson: Is it up to that?

G.S.: That's what they claim, today, on a full year's clip. Not the six-month clip, but the full year's clip. But I think they are running over nine pounds. That's what the USDA claims currently. If I remember, we used to figure, along about 1940, that it was hitting around about eight pounds; that was the commercial sheep, you figured, it was a good clip. And you couldn't do that with the--if they had Blackface cross in them or had very much Suffolk, particularly. The Suffolk breed--my earliest recollections of those was probably soon after they'd become very common in the state. And they didn't look like much to me.

Wilson: Oh, they were terrible.

G.S.: They were a bad-looking sheep.

Wilson: Oh, yes. They were awful looking things.

G.S.: Narrow chested and ewe-necked.

Wilson: Oh, the necks were like swans. And they stood up on these pipe-stem legs; they had no depth of body.

And old Jimmie Laidlaw, now he was a Scotch fellow, and he made one of the most classic remarks, down here in Treasure Island, I ever heard. He had a flock of Suffolks and they were just getting a start. And he stood up at a dinner party and he says, "Gentlemen, there ain't no better property than a good Suffolk sheep, and there ain't no worse property than a poor one." [Laughter.]

G.S.: Jim, a lot of the experimental work that you did. I know that you did a lot of individual fleece studies and I know that you were studying samples, ways of determining

G.S.: shrinkage on fleeces from small side samples, for instance. You were studying things like the rate of growth of wool throughout the year, one time, when I first came to the University, and I was, I guess, a graduate student then. You had some ewes and lambs out in one of the shearing sheds and you were interested in trying to produce lambs with no sulphur in the diet. And you were having a bad time because the little buggers were eating the wool off the mother. Did you ever, were you ever able to get around that problem on those?

Wilson: No, no. But they'll eat the wool because the wool fiber has a sulphur fraction in it, you see, by nature. That is the cystine, you see. It's rich in cystine and cystine is an amino acid with a sulphur bond in it. And, they'd just eat the wool off each other's backs.

#### COMMITTEE AND ORGANIZATION WORK ON AND OFF CAMPUS

A.I.D.: What were your most important committee assignments on campus?

Wilson: I served on several committees. I served on numerous scholarship committees. They seemed to be picked out to ride herd on a certain number of students. Particularly when they got into difficulties. And, I would have to stop and remember a lot of the committees that I served on. I can't think of them right off the bat, except the last one that I served on, not too long before I retired. I was a member of the Regents Scholarship Committee. And I thought that was a fitting way to end my career. I learned a lot about human nature serving on that committee, too. About the narrowness of minds of some people. I came to the conclusion that members of the faculty of a great university are very little different than a similar number of people in any section of life that you want to pick out. About the only difference is that they did better in school. They had better scholastic records when they were in school. Otherwise you find that they're about the same. There's a certain number of them that are drunken sots, a certain number of them who are crooked. Some are too generous for their own good, some are misers, and some have too much religion and some don't have enough.

Wilson: [Laughter.] I don't see too much difference in them. Some of the men right here in Davis for whom I've had the greatest respect are men that I never could entertain in my house because they wouldn't be comfortable in my home. I recall one man who I would swear is as valuable a man as Davis ever had. He was a cabinet maker. Now, he didn't have any business sense, but he was a real Christian gentleman. I know another one who did his best to get a member of the faculty under him fired because he didn't like him. I knew another one that did his best, as a department head, to get a certain woman employee advanced to full title, when the fact of the matter was that he'd fallen in love with her. And this only bolstered my opinion that faculty members are no different. And, I've known some of them, by golly, that pulled the most stupid things you could imagine. Just completely stupid. Well.

A.I.D.: When you got here, how long did it take you to take an active interest in civic affairs? You were very active, you were the chairman of the first planning commission, weren't you?

Wilson: Yes, I was chairman of that for twelve years. That was a wonderful job. I found out very quickly about human beings when I got into that job. If you do something right that pleases them, they never say a word. If you do something wrong that angers them, they get up on the housetops and yell from the gables and tell everybody in town that you're a no-good stinker. [Laughter.] That's the kind of a job that is.

A.I.D.: With that kind of result, why did you want to become a city councilman, as you did?

Wilson: Oh, I didn't really want to, I was pretty young. But, a certain member of the faculty up here, much older than I, was on the council and the Regents decided that the institution would be somewhat better off if he took a leave of absence and spent it elsewhere. So he took a year off and went to Europe, and he was on the council and they had to get somebody to take his place. So I was approached, and asked if I wanted to, and I said all right, I will, and that was all there was to it. No campaigning.

A.I.D.: How long were you on the council?

Wilson: Just a year. Until the man came back. And, I asked him if he would like his job back. Now his home situation was not as pleasant as mine was, and he was grasping every opportunity for an excuse to get away from home. So, yes, he wanted the job back very badly. And, I said all right, it's yours. As far as I'm concerned, I resigned.

A.I.D.: You were a member of the citizens' study group of the Community Church.

Wilson: Was I? I guess I was.

A.I.D.: Did you take an active role in church affairs all your life?

Wilson: Well, yes. I did for a good many years. I held practically every job you could hold, except being the preacher. However, I had good reason to do that. My wife comes from a long line of very religious people. Several of them ministers of the Gospel. Her grandfather established a string of Presbyterian Churches across southern Wyoming and into Utah and so forth, and was a missionary to Africa. And I found that things were more serene if I took an interest, you know. You have to be sensible about these things.

A.I.D.: Were there other civic affairs that you were active in over the years? Civic or--

Wilson: Oh, we had an impromptu theatrical group, used to put on shows. And I participated in that.

A.I.D.: What parts did you play?

Wilson: Oh, whatever they wanted me to do, what I was suitable for. Then, let's see. I wrote several shows that were put on.

The students had an annual affair that they raised money for student loans. They put on a big to-do every year. They expected the faculty to furnish the key vaudeville act or entertainment. And I wrote some of those.

As a matter of fact, student discipline at that time was very much better than it is now. I couldn't possibly teach high school because, the kind of a man I am, I have to give the orders. And, I--if I couldn't give orders to students,

Wilson: I just couldn't have the job, that's all. And, in those days, we expected the students to do as they were told. Now, they didn't always do it, but there was very little of this meanness going on like there is today. Thievery was practically unknown. And today it's rampant. We expected the students to behave themselves, except for mischievous deviltry, which I always found it possible to look the other way. I recall, when I was in the Army and was an officer, an officer in the United States Army is required to take an oath that he will quell all riots. Got over in Newport News, Virginia, one weekend, and that was a sailor town. The sailors had been gypped by a bunch of restauranteurs that were trying to pile it on and make extra profits. And they got fed up with it. They complained to their high officers and it didn't do any good. I went over there on a Saturday afternoon, just in time to see six thousand men walking down the street. And they meant business. They came in and went into these restaurants, picked up tables, chairs, cash registers and everything else, and heaved them out the plate glass windows into the street. And I, brave man that I was, ducked into an alley and I stayed there. There was an Army Captain who took his oath a little too seriously, and he jumped up on a soap-box and tried to quell the riot, and some guy hit him across the back of the hand with a brick and broke several of the bones, what are they--the metatarsals or the metacarpals?

G.S.: Metacarpals.

Wilson: In his hand--and he decided that he wasn't as brave as he thought he was. That brought him down in a hurry. And, the next day you could buy a first-class meal for a dollar. In all the hotels. [Laughter.]

G.S.: In all of the years since 1919, since you've been associated on campus, all of your committee work and teaching and all, I suppose you saw your share of academic rivalries. For example, there was a rivalry between Professor Regan and old Doc Hayes. What was that all about?

Wilson: Oh, they just had a natural feeling for each other. Both of them were great men. They were continually after each other. Every St. Patrick's Day, one of them, Hayes, would go over there and open the door and roll an orange across the floor, and this wild Irishman, Regan, would get up and

Wilson: try to hit him in the head with this orange. Then, they went steelhead fishing on the Klamath River every year. And they would make a bet on the fish. And whichever one lost the bet--the bet was always a dollar--and whichever one lost tried not to pay the debt. Let's see, I recall one year, the last year that it was done, just before Hayes died. He lost this dollar and Regan tried and tried and tried to get it away from him. And, every month Hayes would say, "Now, I'm awful sorry, now I'm going to give it to you, but I'm just a little short this month, so in just a little while." Meanwhile he'd gone out and he'd had this dollar encased. And when he died, there was a note saying to look in such and such a place; they looked in there and here was Regan's dollar. And it was in a cube made of case-hardened steel. With the faces of the cube cut out, but of a size where you couldn't possibly get the dollar out. And you couldn't possibly cut it with a hacksaw. That was his way of saying goodbye to Regan. [Laughter.]

A.I.D.: You were honored by your University of Wyoming when you got your honorary Doctor of Laws in 1944. That must have been a great occasion.

Wilson: Well, you know, you go along through life and keep your nose on the grindstone and try to tend to your business, and if you do that, why, in the natural course of events, you're going to get a few kudos thrown your way. Oh, I had a few. Yes, I was happy over that. But, I'd never believed in people throwing their weight around because of their degrees. I've seen people who did; so have you. Particularly among the young ones who'd just gotten them.

A.I.D.: You've been a member of many professional societies. Which activities stand out most in your mind? You were Honorary Director, for example, of the National Wool Growers, California Wool Growers Association.

Wilson: Yes, I got more pleasure out of that one than any other.

A.I.D.: Why?

Wilson: Well, I knew such a large percentage of the bona fide wool growers and sheep men who belonged to it. Who made up the organization. And they were very warm friends of mine. And, I don't know, I was Western Vice-President of the

Wilson: American Society of Animal Production; now that's a scientific organization. And, I don't know what else. Rotary Club, of course. I have been president of the Davis Rotary Club.

A.I.D.: You were also in the American Genetic Association, according to the records.

Wilson: Well, if I did, I only paid dues. I'd forgotten about that one. I just paid dues.

A.I.D.: Alpha Tau Omega?

Wilson: ATO, Alpha Tau Omega. That was a social fraternity. Yes, I was a charter member of that at the University of Wyoming. That doesn't mean that I was a charter member of the basic organization. It was organized in 1865. But I was a charter member of the Wyoming chapter.

A.I.D.: Is there a chapter in Davis?

Wilson: No.

A.I.D.: You were an honorary member of Bona Amata.

Wilson: Oh, yes. That preceeded. That was a local fraternity here. It was here when we came. And they asked me to be an honorary. And, then later, that became Sigma Nu, I think. And then I became an honorary member of Theta Xi; they are right around the bend here on Russell Boulevard. At any rate, they went national. And, I had to resign. I told them I could not belong to two national fraternities. So I quit. I saved their financial life. They thought I was all right. They got into deep trouble and I told them if they'd do as I said, I'd bail them out and they did. They resented it to beat the devil when they couldn't do as they pleased and I was riding herd on them, but after I got a hold of the mortgage and we put it on a big salver and burned the thing at a dinner, then they thought I was wonderful. [Laughter.]

A.I.D.: You were a member of the American Legion. Were you active in the Legion?

Wilson: Yes, I was a commander of the thing. Right off the bat I

Wilson: got into trouble.

A.I.D.: How?

Wilson: Oh, they had a gang that wanted to ride Congress for the bonus, the so-called bonus. And I didn't go for it. I said, "We won the war, and in doing that we won the right to establish our own homes, and that's enough." And I still think I was right. But Congress went ahead and bought votes by passing the bonus, cost them several billions of dollars for which they got nothing.

#### THE ELASTRATOR

A.I.D.: What's the story of the Elastrator?

Wilson: Well, the Elastrator was a New Zealand invention, invented by a farmer who owned thirty or forty cows and about three hundred head of sheep. His name was A. O. Hammond. And he was a sort of--he was really a good farmer, but in addition, he was a tinkerer and an inventor. And he conceived this idea by reading somewhere that the Arabs sometimes castrated camels by tying a cord up at the base of the scrotum, tying it tightly. So he said, "Well, a rubber band ought to be better." and he devised this gadget that would stretch the rubber band on. Then you'd just use ordinary rubber bands and he found out it worked. Then he refined the design and he got old inner tubes and made a die where he could split the inner tube down and spread the thing out and strike with this die on a mallet and cut these rings out that way. And so, when I saw it, that was the way it was. I'd had no idea of ever being associated with it at all.

A.I.D.: Where did you see this, in New Zealand?

Wilson: I saw it in New Zealand. Then I told him that if they wanted to sell it in the United States, they would never do so until some college of agriculture had run some experiments with it. Because our farmers were close to the colleges, through the extension service.

Wilson: I asked for the privilege of running the first experiments on the Elastrator. And they gave it to me. And they said at the time, "We can't ship any money out of here; that old socialist government won't let us do anything. So you take the Elastrator, take it home, run your experiments, manufacture it and give us a royalty." Well, I said, "I don't think I can do that. I never tried to make a dollar in my life, but I will run the experiments." And I did and they turned out well.

Then I tried three times to get rid of that thing. And it was just at the close of the Second World War and I couldn't. I couldn't find anybody who was interested in making it and finally I got disgusted, and I said, "If nobody else will, I will myself." Well, it was just the hand of fate leading me right along. Because it did a lot for me. I was so ignorant of business that I had to call the California Wool Growers Association representative to come to Davis and tell me how much to charge for the things. And he told me. And I said, "Oh, gee, I don't want to make a lot of money at the expense of my friends." And he said, "Well, don't worry, old boy, you won't. You'll find out a lot making these things [laughter], and that was the truth." Because almost right off the bat I found that I was five thousand dollars in the hole. Of the savings of J. F. and Margaret A. Wilson. That had taken a long time to accumulate.

And, then, I got an unscrupulous manufacturer, although he was recommended to me very highly by a man I respected. This fellow was no good. He had a foreman in his shop who was no good, and when I looked at the first batch of five hundred instruments, I couldn't believe my eyes. They looked like they'd been done by some high school kid down in the shop. So, I said, "I'm either going to do it right or not at all." And I decided that I'd take another stab at it.

I went down there and bought that fellow out. Bought all the jigs and dies that he had, brought them all up here, took them out to the dump and dumped the whole works. It was a hard thing to do. I started again from scratch, and that time I got results. I got a Davis man who was proud of his work. He was an artisan named Percy Symens. And we were associated for years. We never had a cross word.

Wilson: Anything wrong with any instrument, Percy not only made it good, he was anxious to make it good. All right.

A.I.D.: How much were they sold for?

Wilson: Well, we sold them for about six dollars. They sold retail for twelve-fifty. The Wool Growers got the difference. It paid off the mortgage on their building down there.

A.I.D.: In San Francisco?

Wilson: In San Francisco, yes.

A.I.D.: Did that have anything to do with your being awarded the Golden Fleece award?

Wilson: No, oh no, I'd done all my most active work for the Wool Growers before I ever heard of the Elastrator. They gave me a gorgeous set of luggage when I went to Australia and New Zealand the first time. Hartman raw-hide with name inscribed in gold. I've still got it. Pigskin toilet case, all fitted.

A.I.D.: It was the Wool Growers that gave you this?

Wilson: Yes, the Wool Growers.

A.I.D.: Was this part of the award?

Wilson: No, they gave me that and then the other came later.

G.S.: I always thought that Golden Fleece award was so good because it's very special award, and has a lot of color associated with it. And it comes from the producers that you served.

Wilson: Well, it's a very nice award. I was tickled pink when I got that.

#### RETIREMENT

A.I.D.: And, the year you retired?

Wilson: I think it was 1956.

A.I.D.: How have you occupied yourself since?

Wilson: Say, you can really ask embarrassing questions. Is that thing still running?

A.I.D.: Yes.

Wilson: Well, I retired two years ahead of time. Because I had the business downtown, running the Elastrator. I loved to go fishing, and I loved to garden, grow flowers and vegetables and work in the soil. And with these three hobbies, plus some civic duties--I was on the juvenile justice commission of the county, and what else--I was on the board of directors of the Woodland Memorial Hospital. I liked those things. Finally had to give them both up because I was not safe driving at night. But these other things I loved. Then, I discovered that I could have a lot of fun after I had to slow down physically, writing these crazy jingles. And, you know, Glen, the other day I got home from the hospital on Saturday afternoon, and there was the mail sticking in my box. Opened it up and at the insistence of a friend of mine, I had submitted some of these jingles to the Saturday Evening Post and, by golly, they bought them.

A.I.D.: Can you read one of them into the tape machine? Or just take a jingle that you particularly liked?

Wilson: This isn't one of my best ones, but it's passable;

There was once a noble giraffe  
Whose neck measured twelve and a half  
Feet long, it was found, not inches around  
A shape that made everyone laugh.

Now, this same noble animal said  
Let 'em laugh, but when I am fed  
On icecream or candy, my neck is a dandy  
I taste it from "A" down to "Zed".

While his statement may be quite true  
It must also be terrible to  
Take quinine, so bitter, and hope to feel fitter,  
And taste it clear down the avenue.

A.I.D.: You said that you have to start taking it easy, physically? When did that commence? That you have to take it easy, what was the condition?

Wilson: Well, at the age of seventy--I'm now coming eighty-two, very shortly--and at the age of seventy I went over for a routine physical knowing that I was getting shorter of breath all the time, and, at my age, most people do get short of breath. But, I was told by my long-time friend and physician that I had pulmonary emphysema. And, that's when I had to slow down and take it easy. I had been, well, not a heavy smoker, but I smoked too much, and then one of my hobbies was furniture making, and that involved the use of a sanding machine and I got this wood dust in my lungs and the combination was enough. So, that settled it. Now, I was not terribly handicapped until I was about seventy-eight, and then I noticed it. But of course, at that age, when you get to be up there and running on borrowed time, years after your threescore and ten have passed, then there's some question about what is wrong with you except old age. Nearly everybody has something wrong with them. Well, I've had such a happy life that I have no regrets. I'm like Omar Khayyam--a cup that cheers and clears today at past regrets and future fears.

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